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ABSTRACT

The PTA continues to be engaged in projects and programs which relate to parents' and children's perception and understanding of the world of work, education, and career development. Current activities include a project focusing on television's effects on children and youth, the national PTA's Urban Education project determining issues in public education, and activities in the area of testing. The PTA supports career education and the parent's role, which involves two different functions: (1) guider of or resource for his or her own child and (2) advocate for increased opportunities in the area of career education for all children, with emphasis on the impact that parents can have at the community, state, and local levels. From parents children learn attitudes and motivations about work, careers, and goals. To positively influence their children, parents need to learn about employability skills, educational opportunties, needs assessment, and career education concepts. More research and development is needed to disseminate such information, materials, skill development, and the training of parents. Through the PTA parents can assume their roles as advocates for career and vocational education at all levels. (Questions and answers are appended.) (YLB)

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Occasional Paper No. 60

THE PARENT'S ROLE IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

by

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* Conducting leadership development and training programs

PREFACE

We are pleased to have with us Becky L. Schergens, executive director of the National PTA, to share with us her thoughts on parental involvement in the career choices of their children.

Ms. Schergens holds bachelor's degrees in political science and history from Southern Methodist University where she has also done graduate work in these areas. Her extensive background includes experiences in postsecondary administration, public relations, policy analysis, and teaching. She served in various capacities in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, including that of deputy assistant secretary for education, prior to assuming her present position as executive director of the National PTA, a post she has held since 1977. Ms. Schergens is an active member of numerous professional associations in the area of education and was named to the list of Outstanding Young Women in America in both 1971 and 1976. In addition to all of this, Ms. Schergens is a member of our National Faculty.

In her remarks, Ms. Schergens points out that almost from its beginning the PTA has been involved in career education. Research has shown that parents have by far the greatest influence in the career choices of their children. For this reason, Ms. Schergens believes it is essential that parents have the proper information with which to counsel their children. The PTA and the vocational education community together have an important role to play in providing this vital information and in fostering greater career awareness among parents. Ms. Schergens points out that the PTA continues to be a vital force in shaping the educational lives of children and in working toward greater cooperation between home and school, especially in this era of the changing American family.

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education and The Ohio State University are pleased to welcome Ms. Schergens and to present her speech entitled "The Parent's Role in Career Development: Implications for Vocational Education Research and Development."

Robert E. Taylor
Executive Director
National Center for Research
in Vocational Education

THE PARENT'S ROLE IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The thoughts that I am going to share with you today are not carefully researched, footnoted, and annotated as you know them in the research community. They stem from my work with an organization of over six million citizens—mostly parents, teachers, and young people—and they come from my personal experiences as well. The things I have to talk about with you today are going to be very straightforward and simple; and if I am a purveyor of the obvious, I assume that role because I believe today that, in education as well as in many other facets of life, we often turn the simple into the complex; and in doing so, we have supposedly elevated education into a position of heightened importance.

It may have been some time since many of you have had any contact with the PTA. I hope that is not the case; however, I'd like to discuss with you today just a few of the efforts that the PTA has been engaged in over the past year or two, because I believe that they have a great deal to do with the role of parents and the impact of parents in the area of education—specifically, the area of career development. These activities take into account some of the many outside influences that educate our children today. (By outside influences I mean those that occur mainly outside school, outside the classroom—the many influences that educate a child but are not a part of what we consider our traditional education system.) There is a lingering notion that, because PTAs are usually linked to schools, the PTA's only focus is on traditional education. Indeed, our focus is on the child and all issues pertaining to him or her.

One of our major, current activities has been our television project which many of you have heard about. It grew out of a 1975 convention resolution from the PTA which condemned excessive violence on television. Essentially, the program that we have been conducting since 1976 has focused on the effects of television on children and youth. We realize the enormous potential of television as a positive educational tool, and our main thrust is to assure that television becomes even more viable and effective as such a tool in the future. The first action that the PTA took in this area was based on what our members considered the most immediate need—to reduce the amount of gratuitous violence on television. We believe that, while violence exists and is indeed part of the human condition, the television industry has taken license in the excesses shown on television. In the capsulized life span of a thirty-minute television program, one can see, for instance, three murders, a wife beating, a dog being kicked, and hard drugs being used.

Countless other groups and individuals have joined us in our efforts, and we believe that we have been extremely successful in leading the way—not only in expressing our concern about the excessive amount of violence on television and subsequently reducing it, but also in reaffirming our belief that television can and should be a powerful and constructive learning tool for all people, particularly young children.

At present, the PTA is developing a comprehensive curriculum in television viewing skills for use in the schools from kindergarten through grade twelve. One aspect of this project has been the awarding of a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and I think this will be of particular interest

to you in vocational education, because we are going to investigate the accuracy of television's presentation of family life—not only as it portrays people in terms of stereotypes, but also as it portrays the world of work. The curriculum which is being developed right now will use as examples and discussions a number of areas that are of particular interest to vocational educators. Some of the sample discussion topics include, for instance, the portrayal on television of the job stability and satisfaction of the breadwinner. Does the breadwinner ever face unemployment, job dissatisfaction, promotion, job change? We will be looking at the changes and movement of the family due to change in the breadwinner's job. Is the principal breadwinner ever a female? How are these situations reflected on television? Are the people at work actually identified or do they make faceless appearances? Do you ever see anyone—male or female—tired, discouraged, or dirty from his or her work? From this brief description, I hope you get the idea of how our television project has grown, how much we believe that this project has to say, and how it may influence the work that you are doing here.

The second major activity that I want to discuss, just briefly, is the National PTA's Urban Education Project. The initial emphasis of this project has been to conduct hearings around the country. Representatives of the thirty top educators, civic and business leaders, and PTA people who comprised our Urban Advisory Task Force traveled around the country to hear what people in six major cities were saying about urban education. After day-long hearings in six major U.S. cities, we held a national hearing in Washington, D.C. The compilation of the findings and the testimony to date leads us to the conclusion that these five issues in public education today are considered the most important:

1. Inadequate financing for public education
2. Lack of parental and citizen involvement
3. Low academic achievement and student performance
4. Inability of the schools to meet the diverse needs of students
5. Youth unemployment

The major solution that most of the people who spoke at our hearings believed would work was the building of coalitions within the community, with parents as a leading force within these coalitions. Although disappointment was expressed by some of the testifiers about public education today, it was apparent that they have not given up on public education. They still regard it as a viable American institution with the hope of greater promise. I found this viewpoint encouraging in the face of what I would consider pessimism expressed about both our public education system and of those of us who are educators.

Ladies and gentlemen, not only as a representative of the PTA but also as an educator, let me say that our credibility is on the line. The PTA is working vigorously to preserve American public education, and we hope to be continually included as an active partner in its improvement and renewal.

Finally, I would like to tell you about our activities in the area of testing. We published a "white paper" this last year called "The Testing Maze," and I have copies of it available for you. The president of our organization, Virginia Sparling, testified recently before the U.S. House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education on H.R. 4949, the Educational Testing Act of 1979. Among the many points she made—and I think it is probably the one that is the overriding concern of the PTA—is that "the purpose of testing is to improve children's education." I draw your attention to this PTA effort because I believe that tests can play a key role in the assessment of potential. They can and should have a positive influence in the determination made by a child (and his or her parents) about careers, vocations, and the direction a life may take. I believe that we

must refrain from using tests as sorters of our children—as tools to place confines on their potential. Instead they must be used as tools to improve a child's education and a child's opportunity. Tests should not be punitive; they should be constructive and should be given when they can prove most useful.

These are only three areas in which the PTA is currently working and they do have some impact on you and what you are doing here. But we are also very concerned about the whole area of career education. PTA people around the country have been interested in this topic and have actively supported its inclusion into the curriculum. For instance, the New York State PTA has just developed, in conjunction with the New York State Department of Education, a very fine package on career awareness which is going to be used in the schools. But again, the question remains: Isn't there a great deal more in terms of information and techniques for parents that could be made available? That is where the members of my organization are turning to you for help in seeking solutions.

Most of the books and materials I have been reading about career development and career education mention parents' involvement in a very fleeting fashion, if at all. I go back to the program used for the 1976 Office of Education Commissioner's Conference on Career Education, and I find only a very few sections where the parents' role in career selection is even mentioned. I have looked in the ERIC offerings. There are many entries in the area of citizen involvement, but very few touch on the crucial role of parents in career development. In the compendium of NIE grants and contracts (November 1977), only two or three abstracts even mentioned parents, and most of those references were included with citizens, students, etc. There are a lot of entries on citizen involvement and community involvement, but there is very little about the role of parents in career development. This is fertile ground for some of you who are doing your research work. Yet, in *Education for Employment; Knowledge for Action,* the report of the Task Force on Education and Employment chaired by Clark Kerr, the following quotation appears:

> In the course of a normal lifetime, people develop competencies, acquire information and self-understanding, and make decisions regarding education, employment, marriage, where to live, and so forth. Much of the guidance for these decisions is obtained informally through discussions with family and friends, the media, self-exploration of interests and capacities, reading, and so forth. Even at key decision points, where one might anticipate that trained guidance personnel would be especially important, people normally rely heavily on family and friends. In a study of over 30,000 high school seniors in four states, for instance, Tillery (1973) reports that of those who considered college, the most frequently cited sources of advice about choice of college were: parents, 43 percent; counselors, 22 percent; other students, 16 percent; teachers, 10 percent; and college admissions officers, 9 percent.

If guidance in career development and in choices that are made is given informally, and parents seem to play a key role in this informal education, then it would appear that a great deal could be done in the area of research and development to enable parents to be better resources and guiders in the area of offering career choices.

Through the auspices of the Office of Education Advisory Council for Career Education, with which Bob Bhaerman (your colleague here at the National Center) was affiliated at that time, the National PTA produced a publication entitled, *How to Help Your Child Select a Career.* Through this brochure, along with the filmstrip *Everyone Can't be an Astronaut,* the PTA did start to speak out about the role of parents in career guidance and selection. But there are some real gaps. When we are talking about parents' roles, we are talking about two different (although not exclusive) functions:

1. The parent as a guider of or resource for his or her own child
2. The parent as an advocate for increased opportunities in the area of career education for *all* children, with emphasis on the impact that parents can have at the community, state, and local levels

Let me speak first to the question of the parent's responsibility for his or her own child. There have been numerous studies about the significance of role-playing for children from the sandbox age on. And while children may not have an essential understanding of the various job classifications, through their parents they certainly do learn attitudes and motivations about work, about careers, about how they want or do not want to live their lives. Stereotyping can occur because parents have either placed themselves or been placed in certain work and life situations, many times not of their own making. What children get almost by osmosis from their parents can either be exhilarating or deadening, or oftentimes somewhere in-between. The American dream may appear illusory, unattainable, or real, depending on the child's circumstances.

The situation today between parents and children is exacerbated because many parents are struggling with their own life and employment crises. For example, many women are entering the job market either for economic reasons or reasons of life enhancement. Parents of either sex whose skills as primary breadwinners are inadequate may have lost their jobs, or they may be struggling with a great deal of dissatisfaction in their work. Perhaps they feel the need for direction or redirection in their careers. Their awareness of their own need for information about career development and choices is often heightened. But in the market today, even a parent who is adequately motivated to seek change and new opportunities can be thwarted. Now I am not trying to turn career choice into a negative experience. All I am saying is that parents today, in their own minds, are confused about their own lives and, therefore, are extremely bewildered about advising their children. When we see the Bureau of Labor Statistics' projections, broad as they are, we can become even more confused because it is so difficult to predict new fields. The figures show one out of every three jobs that will exist in the future (five to ten years from now) has not yet been created. Many times parents, to put it very simply, are panicked. And that is true even though most or many of the projects and programs that are currently underway in education are aimed at the adult consumer. Translate that, if you will, into the language of a parent counseling his or her young. Add to that a different time and place, a different jargon to use as shorthand for your world, and you often have a realm in which parents feel incapable, ill-equipped, and defensive.

Now, since parents are such a dominant force in the informal counseling process, it seems that they need much more information about the importance of career education and its corollary components. Parents need to be working with their children not only in the discussion of a selection of a career but also in terms of sharpening their own employability skills. These employability skills can be used in the whole larger context of career education. That is, parents need to help their children learn the linkage that must exist among education, work, and life. Parents need to have information about the various kinds of educational opportunities that are available for their child within a school, and I believe that this education must start as early as possible. To wait until a child is in the junior or senior year of high school is often too late.

Parents should be made aware of the vast influence that they have on their children's attitudes toward work and life by conveying their own attitudes to their children. Parents need guidelines to use in their own home to know what kinds of experiences can be the most rewarding for their children. Suggestions should be made for parents on all socioeconomic levels and wherever they happen to be geographically—urban, suburban, or rural. They need to know about what kinds of activities can be used as teaching tools in the home and in the community.

Parents need some tools to do simple needs assessments with their children about interest inventories. It may be that parents are too close to their children to work with them in needs assessments, or they may tend to color their children's lives with unfulfilled ambitions of their own; but it certainly would prove to be interesting and needed research to build upon the home as a reinforcement for the type of education that goes on in the classroom and in the schools.

Parents need to be educated about the total scope of career education. They need to be trained in the various components that can be a part of, although not exclusive parts of, career education. For instance, do parents understand career planning and decision-making, career information, job acquisition and retention, attitudes and appreciation for career success, skills in human relationships for careers, self-investigation and evaluation for career success, personal/work/societal responsibilities, economic factors that influence career opportunity, etc.?

With your help, perhaps the greatest contribution that parents can make in their children's approach to career and life choices is in helping to teach and reinforce the need for adaptability and flexibility in this world of rapid change. In the National School Board Association's report on career education in 1977, Ken Hoyt said: "Adaptability is the key. The only certainty in our kids' lives today is uncertainty." Change. If we don't let kids know how to change *with* change, we will have gypped this generation of kids, and that is one half of career education. Ken also stated in the same report that what he thought we were dealing with was "psychosclerosis," which he defined as "hardening of the attitudes." He further stated that career education is not designed to increase the educational budget—it is designed to increase the educational effort. Much of the focus of the career education component, however, has been in the classroom. This experience needs to be combined with experimental learning at many different levels as well—community, business, labor, industry—and certainly it needs to be reinforced in the home. If it is to "take," then career education most certainly needs that basic and constant reinforcement from the family.

Let's explore some other ways that parents might be able to guide and counsel their children better. The new Gallup Poll found that the newspaper is still the best single source of news about schools. It should continue to be an outstanding source of information about career and educational opportunities as well. *The Chicago Tribune,* for instance, runs large sections of its Sunday paper combining much information about career opportunities and the kinds of things that are going on in the community. It was interesting that recently this paper ran articles about the active steps the community was taking in solving problems of youth unemployment and descriptions of various growing employment fields such as the paralegal profession. In reading across this page, I noticed that one of the major articles suggested specific career guidance sources such as the newly-published *National Career Directory* that lists more than 2,000 places where parents and children can write for free information or inexpensive materials about hundreds of career areas. The same article quoted the president of the Barry Gale Company, which publishes *Career Aptitudes,* as saying, "The question most frequently asked of young people is 'What do you want to do when you grow up?' " Neither the parent nor the school supplies the information that is necessary to make that decision. A child gets more instruction in tennis and driving education than in career selection.

We need to use other media as well to inform parents about the information and how-to's of working with their children. Take television, for instance. We don't have to be on prime time, and we don't necessarily have to be on the major networks, either. "Sunrise Semester" types of courses for parents need to be introduced with an emphasis on parenting skills and in helping children with career selection. In scheduling programs, we need to keep in mind—and even take advantage of the fact—that we have many single-parent families. Certainly parents would like to know how to link education, life, and work; how to help a young person determine the course of his or her educational study; what opportunities are open in the various fields; what is the outlook for expanded growth in fields and for increased technology; where to find more information; and so on.

I would encourage the use of other communication techniques as well. What about developing cassettes and materials for parents to use in the home to help the child with career plans? What about using statewide networks of closed channel television where the programs are beamed out and parents can subscribe to the service? What about having parents' study groups around those television sets and having some of you in front of the cameras showing parents ways they can help and counsel their children? Groups such as the PTA could organize seminars and provide follow-up materials to augment the training.

What about expanding the computer-based information sources that are in place in various locations around the country? Computer-based information programs could be developed for parent rather than professional use. Materials could be "people-oriented" and based on the questions most commonly asked by parents. What about universities and colleges such as yours increasing their efforts to deal with parents' and children's needs for information and tools? Do you realize that over 40 million people in our country today are systematically studying outside our traditional institutions of learning? Certainly, institutions of higher education such as yours must be engaged in some real brainstorming about how to reach parents and convince them that the information and training which you offer will enhance the lives and the roles of not only themselves, as parents, but of their children.

The second major role for parents in career education, as I mentioned earlier, is to be an advocate in the community, state, and nation for career education in order to give our children the guidance and information they need to make the types of life decisions that will be required of them. The National PTA has been in the advocacy role for career education and vocational education since its beginning in 1897. If vocational educators have had an advocate and partner, it certainly has been the National PTA. During the early 1930s, the PTA supported vocational education and guidance. Delegates to the 1930 Annual Convention passed this resolution: "We advocate constructive programs for vocational education and guidance that will enable all youth to find the occupation in life for which they are best adapted and which will enable them to make their largest contribution to social welfare." The promotion of vocational guidance, counseling, and placement services were PTA concerns during the 1940s as well. The 1948–49 platform included this statement: "We urge a continued development and expansion of the field of guidance and counseling, but adult education should be recognized as an integral part of the system . . . Communities should be encouraged to utilize the trained personnel of local professionals and industries to augment the classroom teaching." So you see, for years the PTA has supported some of the basic aspects of career education.

The 1977 PTA convention reaffirmed its basic commitment by passing again the following resolution: "RESOLVED, that the National PTA go on record as fully endorsing and supporting inclusion, in both the public school classrooms and teacher preparation programs, of career education awareness so as to refocus American education in needed and appropriate ways;" (I call to your attention that verb "refocus") "and, be it further RESOLVED, that the National PTA pledge itself to assume an active leadership role in defining and encouraging a proper role and function for parents in the inclusion of career education awareness in our schools."

I cite these examples because I am very proud of what could be considered the avant-garde position that the PTA has taken for a great number of years in the area of career education that you are so vitally concerned about here.

To cite, once again, the recent Gallup Poll, I think it has some very revealing information about the public's attitude toward career education. The public's conception of an ideal school was interesting. I quote here from the Gallup Poll:

> The ideal school would give much more attention to the selection of careers than is presently the case. Days should be set aside each year to review career opportunities, perhaps with local professional and business people taking part. School guidance counselors should give more help in selecting careers.

Immediately preceding that recommendation was the suggestion that courses and seminars should be organized for parents to help them help their children in school.

That same section goes on to say:

> Schools should try to interest a majority of the residents of the school district in attending, at least once a year, a lecture, meeting, or social occasion held in the school building. Schools should ask for community volunteers to help with school affairs and operations.

(This has been one of the major activities of the PTA for a number of years.) And finally, "Schools should see that alumni retain their interest in the school."

Obviously, the linkage in the community between education and the establishment has been placed for parents, or nonparents, or parents whose children have already passed through the system. Certainly the parent's view holds that "Rather little guidance has been offered in the matter of careers." Guidance, the respondents say, is concerned mostly with recommending subjects, help with personal problems and, when in the higher grades, advice about choosing colleges and universities. Only one person in five specifically mentions that his or her child was given help in selecting a career.

In our publication *How to Help Your Child Select a Career,* jointly sponsored by the National Advisory Committee on Career Education, the section called "It's Parents' Work" interestingly enough had only one item which focused on the parent's role with his or her own child in discussing the child's career choices. The rest of them were about the following kinds of activities:

- Talking with local school officials to determine what kinds of career education programs there are
- If none is available, encouraging members of your Board of Education, Chamber of Commerce, labor organizations, or State Department of Education to consider developing career education as a part of the course of study
- Offering to discuss your own work experiences at your child's school or, better yet, if no program for bringing resource persons into the classroom exists, proposing that your PTA unit sponsor one
- Working with individual students who express interest in learning about your particular career area
- Encouraging local industries to make their plants available for visits and tours
- Suggesting and promoting career-education days
- Participating in and helping to organize sessions to obtain more current information
- And, finally, showing a film or filmstrip* on career education at one of your PTA meetings

* An excellent color filmstrip/cassette presentation is available from your state PTA office.

I want to tell you, please, that the PTA and parents can and should be the leading advocates at all levels—community, state, and national—calling for the appropriate legislation and the appropriate programs and projects which will create and implement better career and vocational education programs for young people.

I have no need to tell you what an active year we are having in the area of national legislation. PTA representatives will be attending Vice President Mondale's Baltimore conference on "Work Places and Classrooms: A Partnership for the Eighties." We in the PTA have begun, with other educational associations, an intensive dialogue with officials at all levels regarding the whole issue of youth policy, which is now being considered by Congress and the White House. We are looking forward to the recommendations that will be coming forth on the vocational education legislation.

In conclusion, let me just briefly recap the basic points I have tried to make.

- The PTA is engaged in projects and programs—not all necessarily school focused—that relate directly or indirectly to parents' and children's perception and understanding of the world of work, education, and career development in a positive sense.
- Parents have a key role to play in helping their children focus on choices and decisions to be made about their careers.
- It appears, at least to the uneducated, that more research and development could be done in techniques for dissemination of information, materials, skill development, and the training of parents, with a particular focus on career education/vocational education career decisions.
- Parents can and should be leading advocates for improving and enhancing children's education and opportunities in the fields of career education and development as well as learning. Parents can be useful as advocates at all levels—community, state, and national.
- I am chauvinistic enough to say that the PTA can act as an excellent vehicle for the dissemination of information, but even more importantly in the role of activist for positive change.

Let me offer a challenge to you. I believe that the American public education system has never faced a greater challenge to its original mission and, indeed, to its very existence than it faces today. Even its staunch advocates realize that it must be preserved but at the same time improved. Increasingly, citizens and officials are turning to the schools to link more effectively the world of education and the world of work. Parents can play a key role in seeing that the bridges between the two are crossed more successfully. With more involvement, parents can and will make the linkages between the classroom and the workroom much stronger.

I believe that the challenges facing us as educators and administrators have never been greater. We, collectively, are going to have to throw away many of our old notions, our old concepts, our rigid ideas, and turn to new ways of thinking about education. That is your challenge. We turn to you, the researchers and the developers, to help lead the way, often against the prevailing practices of education and training as we know them today. I leave you with a quote from Abraham Lincoln: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate for the stormy present."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: One of the things you hear regularly is that parents really want a "back-to-the-basics" type of education, and you haven't talked about that. Doesn't that assumption contradict some of what you have been saying?

No. I think when we talk about "back-to-the-basics," we realize and we have always realized that the so-called "basic" skills are an intrinsic part of the whole education package. Just about everyone seems to agree on that point, but the disagreements come when you try to define which career should be considered "basic." We in the PTA would like to consider art education a basic skill, and we have a resolution stating that art education should be considered "basic." I think everybody's definition on that varies a little bit, but we look at basic education and basic skills as the whole educational package.

Question: I find it rather difficult to think that parents can play a very objective role when it comes to guiding and counseling their own children in the matter of career choices. Secondly, since the whole family structure is changing, I am concerned about whether attention ought to be directed toward parent surrogates—for example, day care instructors—more than parents.

I think those are points well taken. If you will remember when I talked about needs assessment, I said that perhaps the parents are too close to the child to make an objective judgment. I also said that many times children are regarded as vessels for the unfulfilled ambitions of parents. I will have to say, though, that parents are indeed very much a part of the informal network used by their children as a counseling resource. Because this is true, it seems to me that it would behoove the parent to have as much information at his or her fingertips as possible, because parents counsel—for better or for worse, ladies and gentlemen—they *do* counsel their children. And if I were on the receiving end, I would much prefer to be counseled by somebody who knows what he or she is talking about than by somebody who doesn't.

Your other point about surrogates is indeed true. I had the privilege of sitting next to a sociologist on a plane several weeks ago. We were talking about career choice, and the discussion came around to precisely this point—parent surrogates. I asked him what he considered the most important role parents could play in the career development of their children.

As far as he was concerned, he said, the most important role parents could play was to actually provide the opportunity for their child to get his or her first job. He meant the parents should literally find the child a job.

"That's fine," I said, "but that implies that there is at least one breadwinner in the family who already knows the system."

Of course he began talking about the American family and the beauty of the tightly-knit ethnic community and what a marvelous opportunity it is for these children to have resource people right there.

But I said, "Hey, wait a minute. What about kids who don't have any parents or, as you were saying, surrogates of some sort? What about the single-parent families? You know the American family doesn't look the way it used to. What about the families that don't know the system? They have enough problems breaking into it themselves."

So your point is very well taken, and I would love to hear some feedback from you about some messages I can take back to the PTA.

Question: I am amazed that kids know as much as they do about career choice and career planning and so on based upon the investment we make. In a typical city, the average student receives only about 720 minutes of guidance counseling in a six-year period. In mathematics or science, students get about 120,000 hours in the same six-year period. Given these statistics, what can the PTA do to escalate the importance of guidance and counseling within budgetary limits?

In response to your question, I am happy to say that a good example came immediately to mind. I recently had the pleasure of traveling to Nevada and meeting several people from the Nevada State PTA. Just to let you know that the PTA *can* make a difference, a parent-PTA group went to the Nevada legislature in a tight budget year and lobbied hard for supplying counselors for elementary school kids. Elementary school counseling, as I understand it, is a fairly new field. Many parents at the hearing got up and testified about what having an elementary school counselor had meant in their own lives and in counseling their children—not only about careers, but about many other areas that affect school and home life. This is the kind of advocacy role in which parents can make a significant difference, and that is only one example.

Question: You indicated in your comments that we have got to reach the full spectrum of the public. Can you tell us about any exemplary programs where you've achieved success in reaching the hard-to-reach parents? What can we do to involve those communities where the participation, the involvement, the caring are at a very low ebb?

One thing I believe very strongly is that educators and administrators must make sure that the welcome mat is always out for parents—not the welcome mat that says, "Welcome. Please sit down and do what I say." I mean a welcome that invites partnership with parents. I think this is particularly important when you get into urban areas where the socioeconomic level is somewhat lower and there is a definite hesitancy about going into the school.

The attitude on the inside of the school really speaks to the contribution that parents can make no matter how they look or what they do. In this regard, we have to be careful about our body language. Often we don't have to tell certain people that we don't care for them or that they are beneath what we consider to be "acceptable." We exude it sometimes, and then we wonder why we get negative results. So, a welcoming attitude is of primary importance. We are also attempting to reach out into the community. We don't always have to have all of our activities focused in the school. You have to go where the people are. Some of our most successful PTA programs are held in the parents' work places. PTA representatives meet with the parents on their lunch hour. They sometimes meet in the homes of some of these people—not ever to the point of embarrassment, but only when the parents have invited the teacher and other parents into their homes to have their discussions. I know a lot of schools that encourage this. The day of the 7:30 first-Monday-of-the-month PTA meeting is fast fading.

All of us have to look for new and creative ways to get parents involved. Particularly with the energy crunch, we forget that transportation often glues us to certain patterns. We also forget that some parents don't have cars or the 50 cents to get on the bus to come to the school.

Question: What materials do you have available for classroom use in addition to your filmstrip? Specifically, do you have career awareness materials suitable for classroom use in the primary grades?

I have to say that our materials available for general distribution are somewhat lacking at the present time. However, we do have several things. In addition to the career awareness packet developed in conjunction with the New York Department of Education and the New York PTA, we have a lot of materials that have been developed around the country. But when you consider that we are in more than 28,000 schools, we need a clearinghouse for that information. If someone wants to volunteer to do that as a research project, to work with parents, and to use the computers here at Ohio State, I will be glad to talk to you right after this is over.

Meanwhile, I have some materials up here, and I will be glad to talk with you about your specific needs.

Question: What are you doing to meet the language problems that are arising in the inner city? You talk about parents' groups, but many parents do not speak English—or if they speak it, it is far from fluent. This lack of communication causes enormous problems for both the parents and the children.

As you know, that is a big issue and one in which we in the PTA need further education ourselves. I remember meeting with one of our state PTAs just after they had passed a resolution *against* bilingual education. When they were asked why they took a stand against this issue, one of the parents replied by saying, "Because I don't want my child to have to learn a second language." So, you see, we have a massive education project on our hands in two ways—we need to educate *ourselves* as well as the general population on the issue.

I really cannot give you specific examples of fullfledged PTA programs on the issue *per se.* But I *can* tell you that PTA people have volunteered throughout the country when there have been relocation efforts, for instance, with Vietnamese refugees, particularly in Arkansas. PTA people have worked very closely with these efforts in the classroom as aides, and I know that it is a concern. Particularly in the Spanish-speaking areas, we are doing much more work from the national level. The problem there primarily is with dialect. Puerto Rican Spanish and Mexican Spanish are entirely different, even though you may think someone with basic Spanish can understand both fairly easily.

Question: In discussing your urban education project, you listed the issues which surfaced from your hearings. I was surprised not to find discipline among those because in every survey I have seen that is always right at the top in public hearings.

It tied for tenth place with inadequate preparation of teachers. I just gave you the top five. I was absolutely fascinated by these hearings, because one of the things that we wanted to do was to spend a good portion of our time listening to what people had to say. While I can't say that from a research standpoint this would in any way be *statistically* representative of the communities that we were involved with, I would say that of those people who testified, these really were their top

concerns. Inadequate school financing, as I said, was number one. They were really concerned about the whole question of student performance, and they voiced those concerns quite apart from the negative connotations that are often associated with discipline.

That word "discipline" is very misleading. We are doing a major program in the whole area of discipline, and I have been trying to figure out what to call it, so I need some help from you. Discipline is a problem; so is vandalism; so is absenteeism. But they all seem to stem from the fact that kids, in negative ways, are expressing their dissatisfaction with education, with society, with the fact that they may not be able to get a position (let alone a career) when they get out of school. I don't know exactly what to call it, but I think they are all real expressions. What would *you* call it?

Question: Did your urban education project include urban communities where bussing was under way?

We started out in Philadelphia, which I have to say was exceptional because we do not have a PTA within the city of Philadelphia. They have a Home and School Association which disassociated with the PTA in 1910 because they thought a nickel was too much to pay to the national association.

We went to Seattle, Kansas City (Missouri), Houston, Detroit, and Miami. All of these cities have had bussing, but whether they were involved in bussing at the time of the hearings is hard to say. We started in November of 1978. I don't know where, on the whole continuum, those particular cities were with the bussing issue at that time. All of the hearings, except those in Philadelphia, were held in January, February, and March of 1979.

Question: It seems to me that the parents with the time and money to do the things the PTA is talking about are deserting the public schools in favor of private and parochial schools. My concerns are for the public schools in Philadelphia and similar cities where the school population is about 85 percent black, where it takes both parents working a full eight-hour day to take care of the family needs. Those people are tired when they come home. What do we do in cases like that?

These are real concerns for all of us, and I want you to know that the PTA is taking an active role in seeking solutions. The National PTA led the Coalition to Save Public Education, a massive group of more than forty-two organizations in the country united to defeat the tuition tax credit legislation this last time it came up. We plan to organize a similar type of activity if it comes up again this year.

We are very concerned about what is happening in California right now with the whole question of the family choice initiative. I was really amazed by the statistics from California. The number of students in private education in that state has gone from 6 to 12 percent in recent years. However, the private schools still have a large part of the minority population. If my memory serves me correctly, something like 43 percent of the minority kids go to *private* California schools.

I think the issue here is the viability of the public schools. The National PTA is very, very strongly in the public education camp because we believe free and public education is a basic premise of our whole society.

Question: In terms of the way the National PTA is organized, do you have a national meeting every year? And if so, when is that usually scheduled?

Yes, we *do* have an annual national meeting, usually scheduled during May or June. We are going to be in Honolulu in 1980, off the mainland for the first time. So yes, indeed, we do have a national convention. At this time representatives from the various state PTAs meet together and discuss issues of national concern.

Question: Would you expand on that a little bit? What, then, is the rest of the organization, and how directly effective can the organization be when it goes into the local areas?

Our national organization is made up of fifty-two state PTAs, each with its own board of directors. We have districts and councils, which are generally organized on a community-wide basis (sometimes many within a given city), and affiliates (called "units") which are generally synonymous with the local school.

As for effectiveness, let me use the tuition tax credit as an example. At the time the PTA got involved, Senator Moynihan was predicting that it was a *fait accompli*—that there was no way tuition tax credits could be defeated. Some three to four months later he had definitely changed his mind. I think we can be very effective, particularly on issues that concern American public education, and we may be the only hope you've got. So I urge all of you to buy cards and memberships and join in our fight.

Question: How did you measure your influence in reducing violence on TV?

Well, there were a number of ways—for one, the sheer fact that one can observe on television, I believe, a diminution of violence in contrast to what it was nearly three years ago when we took up this fight. It can also be measured by the terrific cooperation we have gotten from countless citizens and organizations around the country. I just read that the machinists' union is now going to monitor television in prime time, as the PTA has done for the last two years. So those are a couple of ways one can see the effectiveness of the project. There has been a terrific amount of concern, conversation, and dialogue with the officials of the television industry. Now it's not unheard of for them to call us when they are testing new programming.

When I was talking about the television project earlier, remember that I was talking about the *total* effect of television on children and youth. Violence is only one part of what we're dealing with. We're greatly interested in using television as a positive educational tool for all people.

Question: In terms of the role of parents in career development, to what extent is sex equity a priority for the PTA?

Sex equity has been a priority for the PTA almost since its inception, when it was called the National Congress of Mothers. If you could ever get together a group of people who are most keenly aware of sex equity, it would be our group. In the whole development of the child, this is obviously a key component.

I worked in the area of sex equity at HEW for a period of time. I have been working with Harley Cox and some of the people at PEER and with the Women's Educational Equity Act. What we are

attempting to do right now is to make even more dramatic the types of information that we are getting out to our members. Our whole May issue of "PTA Today" focused on sex equity—particularly Title IX, the Women's Educational Equity Act—primarily in the area of information.

I know the Texas PTA did a great deal of work in that area about three years ago, especially as it relates to textbook and educational materials selection. Many of our members have been working closely with state boards of education and others in state departments to assure, for instance, that our textbooks adequately reflect the world as we know it.

The television project, through the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation grant in curriculum viewing skills, is a vital part of our sex equity effort. What we are attempting to do through this project is to work with kids to see whether, looking at television, they can realize and understand stereotyping and discrimination as they occur. We need to know whether or not they are aware of it. Through our work with children, we find that the consciousness of parents is heightened as well.

These are only two of our many efforts in this area.

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